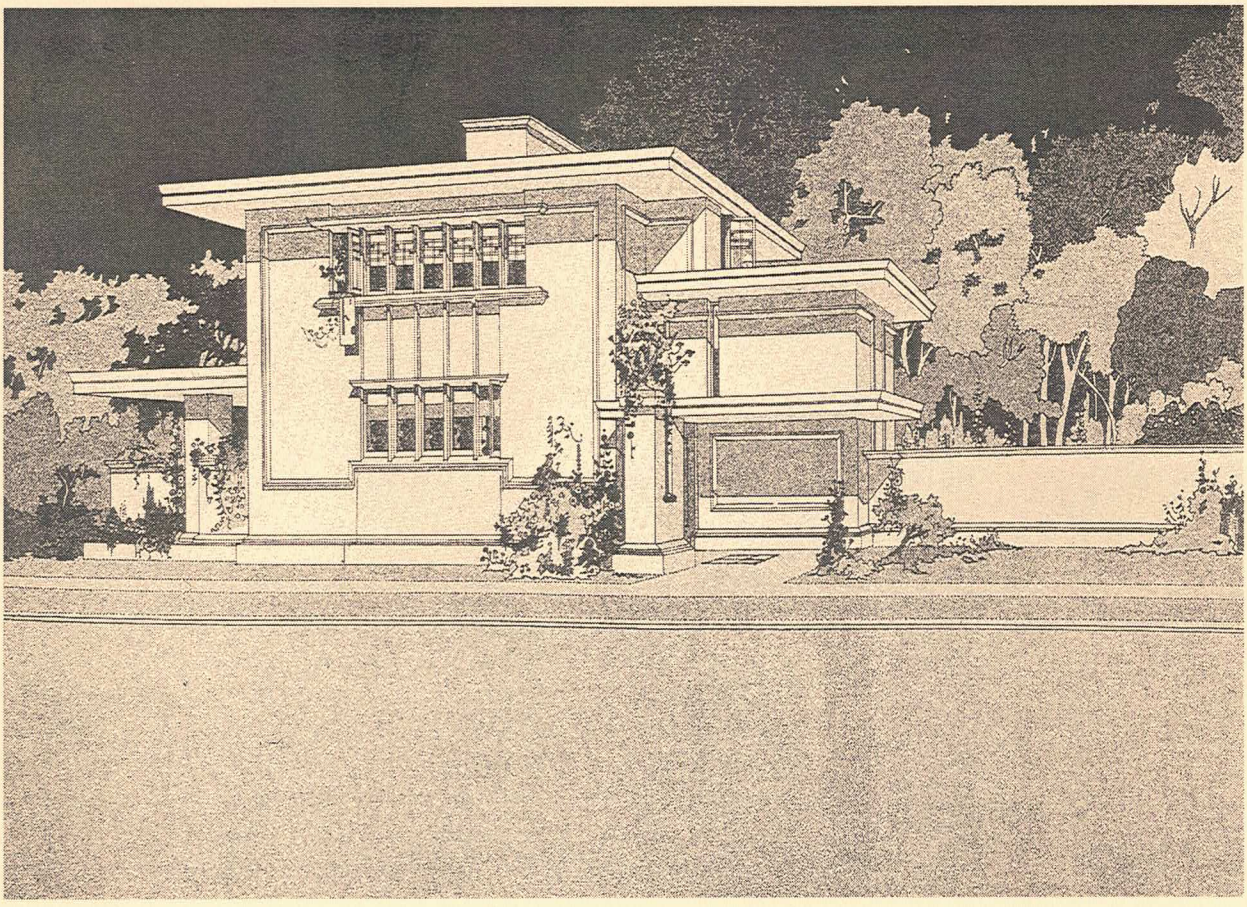
PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION



AMERICAN·SYSTEM-BUILT HOUSES□DESIGNED·BY FRANK·LLOYD·WRIGHT■

10410 and 10541 South Hoyne Avenue

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS
DECEMBER 1, 1993

City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Valerie B. Jarrett, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance and given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value.

Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmark. This ensures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendation to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information, which summarizes the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark, has been prepared by the staff and submitted to the Commission.

The report should be regarded solely as a preliminary document. It is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

COVER: A drawing and title block from the promotional literature for American System-Built Houses. The house shown is of a similar scale and design to the two houses built in Chicago in 1917.

FRONTISPIECE: Advertisement from the *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1917.

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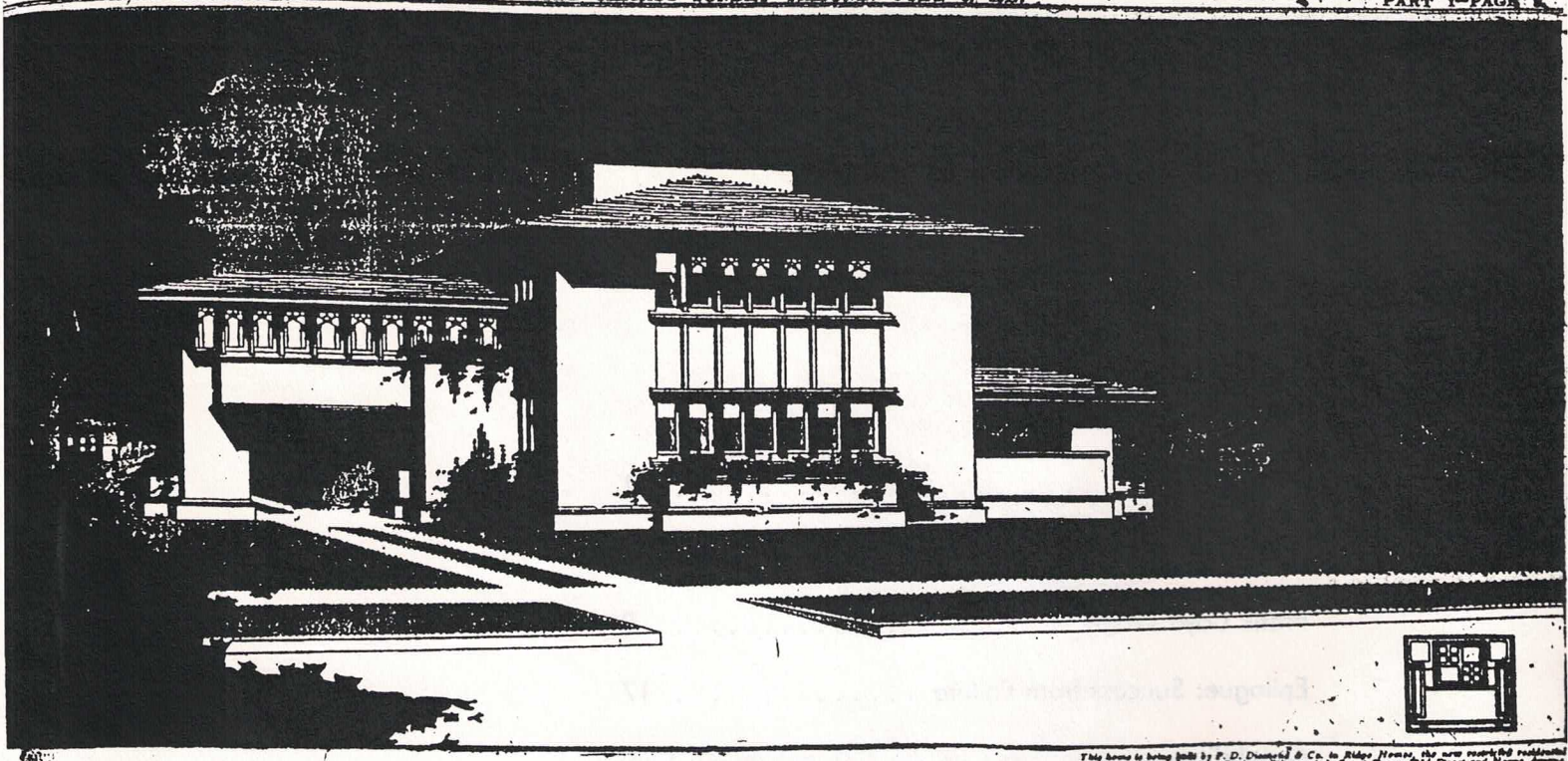


This home is being built by F. D. Diamond & Co. in Ridge Homes, the new restricted residential subdivision being offered by Burbank-Elmwood & Co. at Touhy, Ridge Road and Keeney Avenue.

YOU CAN OWN AN AMERICAN HOME

BEFORE the summer is over you can be the possessor of an American Home, built for YOU from the plan YOU select. You and your family can be enjoying its charm, beautiful design, its convenient arrangement, its substantial construction.

You can occupy it late this summer or early this coming fall. The price will be guaranteed in advance. The arrangement for payment will meet your convenience.

People in Chicago are just beginning to realize that American Homes are not high priced. Because American Homes look better and have the air of being out of the class of ordinary houses, many home builders have hesitated even to investigate them.

But just as soon as they understand that an American Home costs no more, or even less than others, they are buying rapidly.

We want you, if you are contemplating owning a home now or in the future, to talk to us. All we ask is the opportunity to place before you the facts regarding the moderate prices and special arrangements which will allow your American Home to be built NOW instead of in the distant future. But before we invested you of the special advantages of American Homes which would make you buy even if the price were much higher.

This Is Distinctly American Architecture

American Homes reflect American spirit. They are the latest triumph of Frank Lloyd Wright, recognized as abroad as America's greatest architect. His fame is world-wide, though his most important work has been to teach American people how they can live in houses that are beautiful, individual and enduring.

An American Home is as truly the product of the mind as thoroughly national as a French chateau or an Italian villa.

Homes With Personality and Beauty

American Homes have character. They command recognition. Their dignity, their quiet lines, their strength and their individuality, make them stand forth from the mass of ordinary designs.

These houses are the one, new, stirring note in this oldest and most important of all the arts—the art of home building. As a great writer has said: "They have music and meaning in them."

Convenient, Practical Enduring

When you first see an American Home, either the actual structure or the drawing which we show you, you will be struck by its beauty, its cheery, homelike appearance.

When you enter an American Home you will marvel at the skill which could so perfectly combine charm of outline and effect with absolute convenience and practicability for everyday use.

American Homes are "livable" places for you and your family to spend your lives in. They seem "home" to you from the day you take possession. They make for cheer and comfort and happiness.

Cross-lighting and cross-ventilation make them healthful. Scientific designing gives ample space where it is needed and saves steps. Every woman will be delighted with these plans. They reduce her responsibilities, whether she executes personally or merely supervises household duties. All the little extras and advantages that mean so much in the daily routine of home maintenance are found in American Homes.

The Home You Would Plan

American Homes are the kind you yourself would plan. In fact, you will plan yours, for you will choose, from among the many, exactly the one that suits your every need as to space and the number and arrangement of rooms. All the faults of the ordinary house plan are eliminated. No waste space, no dark corners. Every square foot of an American Home has its use and its value to you.

And you have the choice of so many designs that you are sure to find one that is essentially YOUR home, the home you have sought but never before found.

A Guaranteed Price No "Extras"

If you have ever built for yourself, or if your friends have, you know that the bugbear of home-building is the long list of "extras" that mount up as the construction goes forward.

These "extras" can not worry you when you purchase an American Home. The price is guaranteed. You know in advance exactly what your American Home will cost. And the quality of material and workmanship is guaranteed.

Built by Established Contractors

The American System does not alter present building conditions. American Homes are being erected by established contractors and builders who are enthusiastic over the practical character of the construction, and beauty and permanence of the finished edifice.

Come to Our Office—Learn How YOU Can Own An American Home

To you who live in apartments or in a house not your own, decide now to have a beautiful home of your own. Learn how easily you can become the owner of an American Home—within the next few months. Our arrangement will surprise you. You will find the terms suited to your convenience. Payments can be made monthly. American Homes range in price from $3,000 up.

And see the plans of American Homes. They are different and more complete. Some drawings show not only the walls, doors and windows, but the position of the furniture. It is as if the roof were lifted off. You look into your future home as it will be when you occupy it.

You can study the specifications that protect you at every stage of construction. You will be quoted the guaranteed price—no "extras"—on your completed home, ready for occupancy, with quality guaranteed and no building worries.

A visit to our office places you under no obligations whatever. So come at your earliest opportunity. Let us prove every advantage of American Homes. You are to be the judge. We gladly place the facts before you and leave the decision to you. But act at once. For your American Home can be built this summer if you wish, under this broad, generous plan.

Or Write for Suggestions Suiting Your Requirements

If you cannot conveniently meet with us at our office, we will send you a number of beautiful illustrations, together with interesting facts about American Homes.

—BUILDERS—

GEO. B. CHAPMAN — Berwyn ELLINWOOD & BRAGG — North Shore, West Side, La Grange to Naperville — AMERICAN HOME BUILDING CO. — South Side, Riverside, Hollywood — F. D. DIAMOND & CO. — Gary — INGWOLD MOE — Champaign — J. P. RESSEL — Decatur — E. E. BARROW

LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN HOME BLDG. COMPANY

These houses are built by builders having exclusive rights in their territory. There are still desirable locations not yet placed, for which we will be glad to negotiate with responsible and substantial builders who can appreciate the sales possibilities of this enterprise. Write us, or call at our office, 1st floor, Chicago Savings Bank Building, corner Madison and Rockwell streets, in the northwestern Middle West district, but in the surrounding territory.

Westmont & Lake Forest — Berwyn & Oak Park — Rockwell and Wilcox — Central Street, Evanston — Old Park and Ayers — Harvard Park — Rockford

Highland Park — Hubbard Woods & Winnetka — Glencoe

Highland Park — Hubbard Woods & Winnetka — McCormick & Ogden — Wilcox

Rockwell & Chicago Savings Bank Building, 7 West Madison Street—Telephone Central 6677

CHICAGO BRANCH OF THE HOME BUILDING COMPANY

Frank Lloyd Wright's American System-Built Houses

Burhans-Ellinwood & Co. Model House
10410 S. Hoyne Ave.
Chicago, Illinois

H. Howard Hyde House
10541 S. Hoyne Ave.
Chicago, Illinois

Date: 1917
Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright

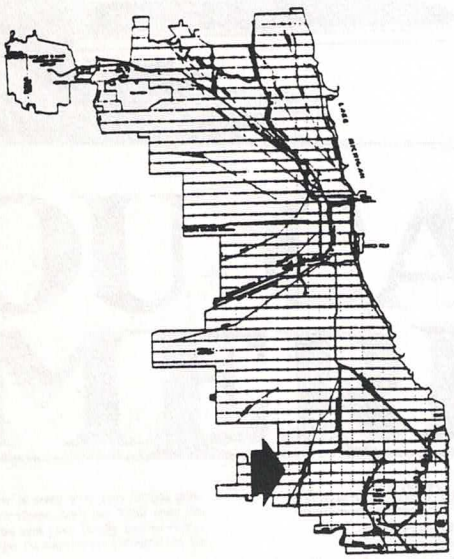
In the years preceding America's entry into World War I, the real estate pages of Chicago's newspapers became a major resource for city dwellers seeking to follow the "American dream" by building homes for their families. Every Sunday, large display advertisements vied for the attention of potential home-owners with offers of lots in outlying subdivisions and a variety of "build-to-suit" houses to meet any budget.

Early in 1917, a particularly eye-catching series began to appear showing houses unlike the bungalows usually offered. Each was accompanied by seductively worded copy offering fine design and high ideals:

> *There's a bright, cheerful home waiting for your family and you. A better home. Better built, excellently planned, far more livable.*
>
> *More beautiful? Yes it will have that rare thing -- genuine architectural beauty -- designed by a leader of architects.*
>
> *You select your plan. It is built to your order -- your own.*
>
> *Designed by America's great creative architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Constructed by a system that guarantees a high grade building and a known price -- no extras.*
>
> *In short, an AMERICAN HOME.*

Ads like this, which were written by copywriter-turned-novelist Sherwood Anderson, were typical of those used to promote American System-Built Houses, a remarkable, but short-lived enterprise that offered a series of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed houses to the public at an affordable cost.

After revolutionizing American residential architecture with his innovative custom-designed "prairie houses" at the turn-of-the-century, Wright was commissioned by the Richards Company of Milwaukee to produce a series of standardized designs that could be purchased and erected anywhere in the country. Potential homeowners could choose from a catalogue of Wright designs of varying cost and size. According to the manufacturer's claims, savings were afforded by the fact that all elements of the building, including wood studs, millwork, and trim were pre-cut to size using mass production factory methods, eliminating the need for costly, labor-intensive carpentry work at the building site and architect's fees.



Locator Map

Chicago is fortunate to have two excellent examples of the American System-Built Houses. Of the handful of houses erected throughout the Midwest, only two are known have been built in the city before the United States entry into World War I ended the project.

The Chicago houses are in a fine state of preservation and document a significant and overlooked aspect of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural career. As individual buildings, they are in themselves important examples of Wright's contributions to international architectural development.

The American System-Built Houses represent a major step in Frank Lloyd Wright's lifelong experiments in the use of machine-produced, standardized materials to create quality, affordable housing. Despite its potential, the American System-Built Houses enterprise was not a commercial success. Had the scheme caught on, the typical "Chicago Bungalow" potentially could have been a Frank Lloyd Wright design.

Chicago's American System-Built Houses

The Chicago American System-Built Houses were erected in 1917 as part of a speculative subdivision developed in the far southwest neighborhood of Beverly. Sited a block apart in a subdivision known as "Ridge Homes," the houses

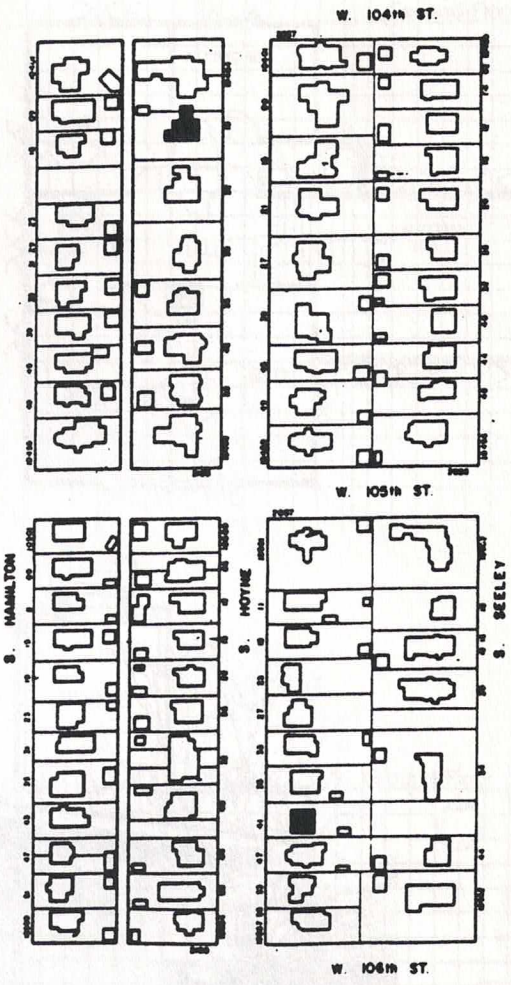
constitute two of the best and most intact examples of American System-Built Houses in the country. Promoted in 1917 by the real estate firm of Burhans-Ellinwood & Company, Ridge Homes was one of many speculative subdivisions developed after the Chicago city limits embraced the far southwest side the early twentieth century. Like other subdivisions of the period, Ridge Homes offered city dwellers the suburban ideal of generous lots and convenient access to downtown to Chicago via commuter railroad. Ridge Homes stood out from other subdivisions by offering prospective purchasers Wright-designed American System-Built Houses as a house-and-lot package deal, ensuring the architectural continuity and high quality of the development.

Because the Ridge Homes development was marketed for the upper-middle class owners, the houses represented the larger and more expensive American System-Built designs. Both were two-story, three-bedroom houses costing approximately $6,000 each, not including the cost of the land.

The collaboration between the developers of Ridge Homes and the promoters of American System-Built Houses may have been the result of a mutually advantageous promotional arrangement. Early in 1917, Bunhans-Ellinwood & Company began construction of a demonstration model house in the Ridge Homes development using one of the upper-priced designs in the American System-Built Houses catalogue. While serving as a model to attract potential purchasers to the Ridge Houses development, the house was also prominently featured in newspaper advertisements promoting American System-Built Houses.

In addition to the model home, a Wright-designed American System-Built House was erected in Ridge Homes for H. Howard Hyde, a cashier for the downtown offices of International Harvester Company. Similar in size and cost to the model house, the Hyde House was built from a different design from the American System-Built Houses catalogue, reflecting the diversity of houses offered and a desire to vary the design of individual houses within the subdivision.

The majority of the executed American System-Built Houses known to exist today throughout the Midwest are modest cottages, making the two upper-scale Chicago houses critical for the documentation of Wright's designs for the project. The houses also



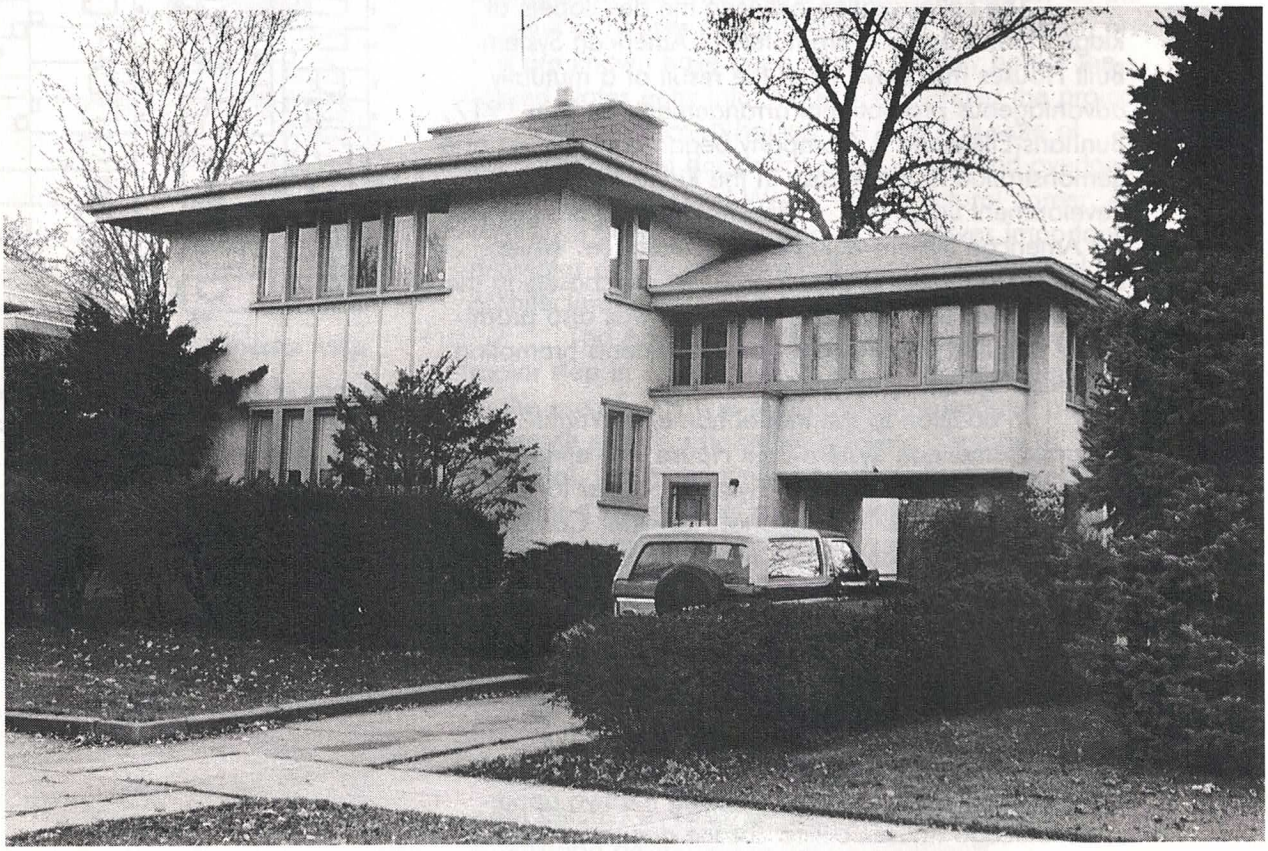
A map of the Ridge Homes subdivision in the Beverly neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. The two Wright houses are shown in black.

complement the fragile chronology of Wright's architectural development in the Chicago metropolitan area, being among the few extant houses erected in the area after 1909 when the architect left his residence and studio in Oak Park, Illinois.

Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House 10410 S. Hoyne Ave.

A rendering and brief description of the Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House first appeared in an advertisement for American System-Built Houses published in the *Chicago Tribune* on June 3, 1917.

The rendering varies in design and detail from the actual working drawings and the executed building, suggesting that it was a preliminary study for this particular American System-Built Houses design. Although the rendering shows a reversal of orientation from the executed building, the ability to reverse floor



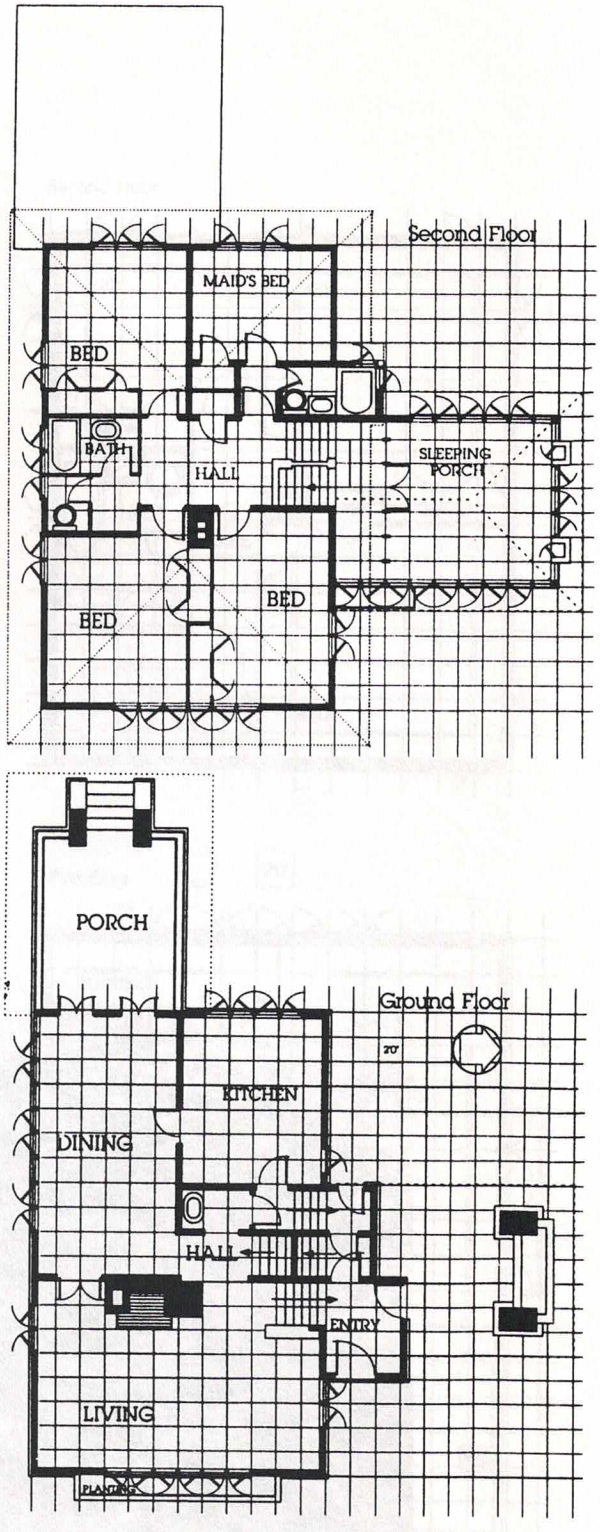
The Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House incorporates an open-air automobile shelter, reflecting the growing importance of the automobile in the early twentieth century.

plans was an integral part of the preparation of plans for prefabricated housing. To reverse a plan for specific sites, the drawings were simply blueprinted backwards, creating a reverse image.

The building permit for the Model House was taken out on July 17, 1917, and the building completed by December of the same year. Construction was undertaken by P.D. Diamond, who held the franchise for the erection of American System-Built Houses on the South Side of Chicago and suburban Hollywood. Although built as a demonstration house for Burhans-Ellinwood & Company's "Ridge Houses" development, actual ownership of the house was held by Diamond. The Richards Company encouraged the construction of demonstration houses by American System-Built Houses franchise holders; consequently, a mutually advantageous agreement may have been worked out between Diamond, the Richards Company, and the Ridge Homes developers in erecting the model house.

The expansive appearance of the Model House belies the inherent simplicity of plan and footprint that made the design of American System-Built Houses adaptable for construction on unspecified sites. To permit flexible siting on confined urban lots, the principal rooms are planned within a contained rectangular volume, a solution used by Wright in earlier custom-designed urban houses such as the Heller House (1897) and Walser House (1903) in Chicago, and his prototypical design for "A Fireproof House for $5000" published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1907.

The monolithic massing of the main part of the house is broken on the streetfront by a slightly recessed, vertical window bay, complementing the strong horizontal emphasis of the broad eaved roofs. A wing asymmetrically extending from the north side of the house incorporates a second-floor sun porch enclosed by a continuous ribbon of casement windows. Below, an open-air automobile shelter acknowledged the developing importance of the automobile in American family life. A transitional first-floor projection at the juncture with the main house defines Wright's characteristic use of a side, rather than a front, entrance and visually carries the second-floor sun porch above. Structural support for the end of the porch wing is provided by projecting vertical members set in from the corners, creating a complex abstraction of surface planes and structural expression.

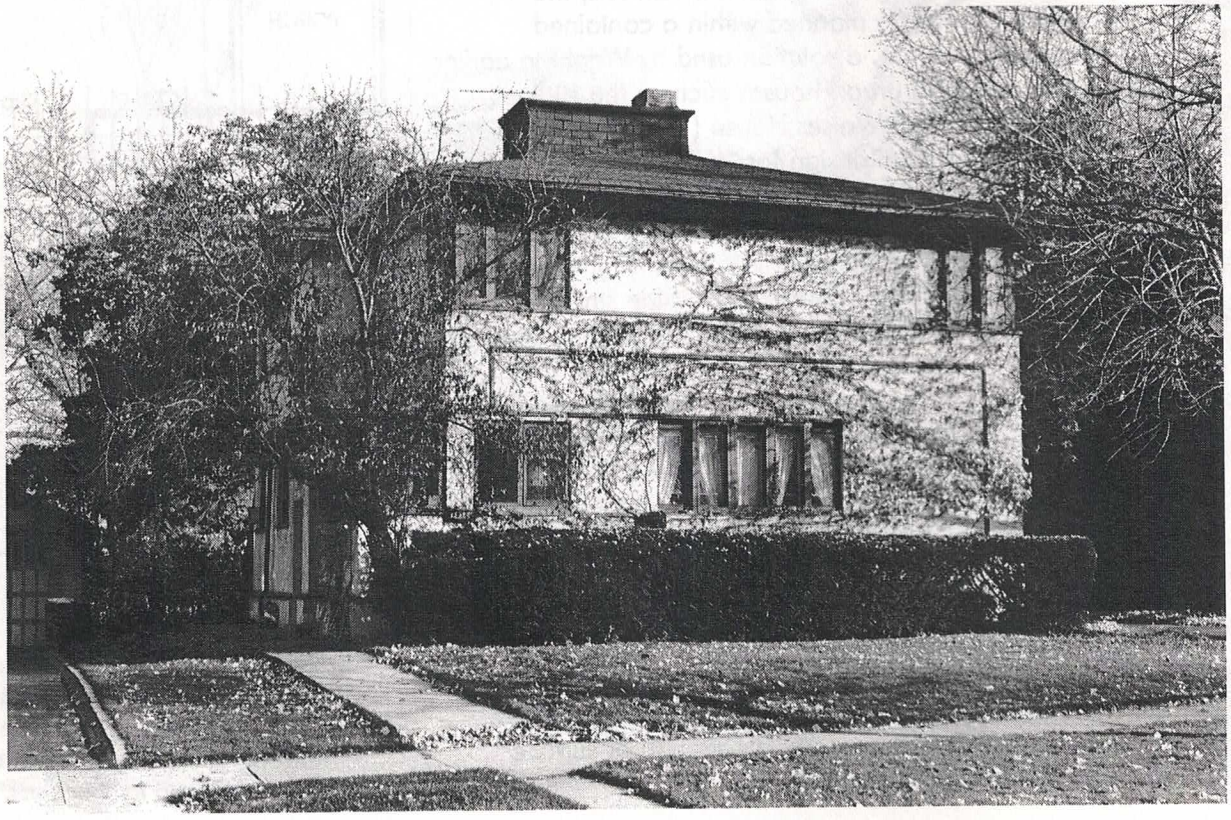


Like all designs in the American System-Built Houses catalogue, the plan of the Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House was laid out on a two-foot module, in order to efficiently use standard lumber sizes.

An unusual detail used in both of the Chicago American System-Built houses is the incorporation of a shingled falsework chimney cover at the top of the roof. The economies of the American System-Built Houses only allowed for the construction of a narrow brick chimney at the center of the house. Consequently, Wright visually widened its dimensions with a shingled casing to suggest the broad chimneys used in his custom-designed houses. Emphasis on the central chimney stack was an important aspect of Wright's designs, as it represented a central design axis for the design of the exterior and interior.

Principal rooms of the first floor are planned as interconnected spaces, flowing on axis with the central chimney stack. The living room extends the full width of the house, with access to the dining room through double doors to the right of the fireplace or through a central entrance hall. The second floor is planned for three family bedrooms and a servant's room.

The building remains in an excellent state of preservation, and remains largely as originally built.



The arrangement of window openings and wood trim on the H. Howard Hyde House belies the block-like form of its massing and plan.

H. Howard Hyde House
10541 S. Hoyne Ave.

The American System-Built House erected for H. Howard Hyde chronologically predates the construction of the Model House by nearly two months, the permit having been taken out by contractor P.D. Diamond on May 16, 1917.

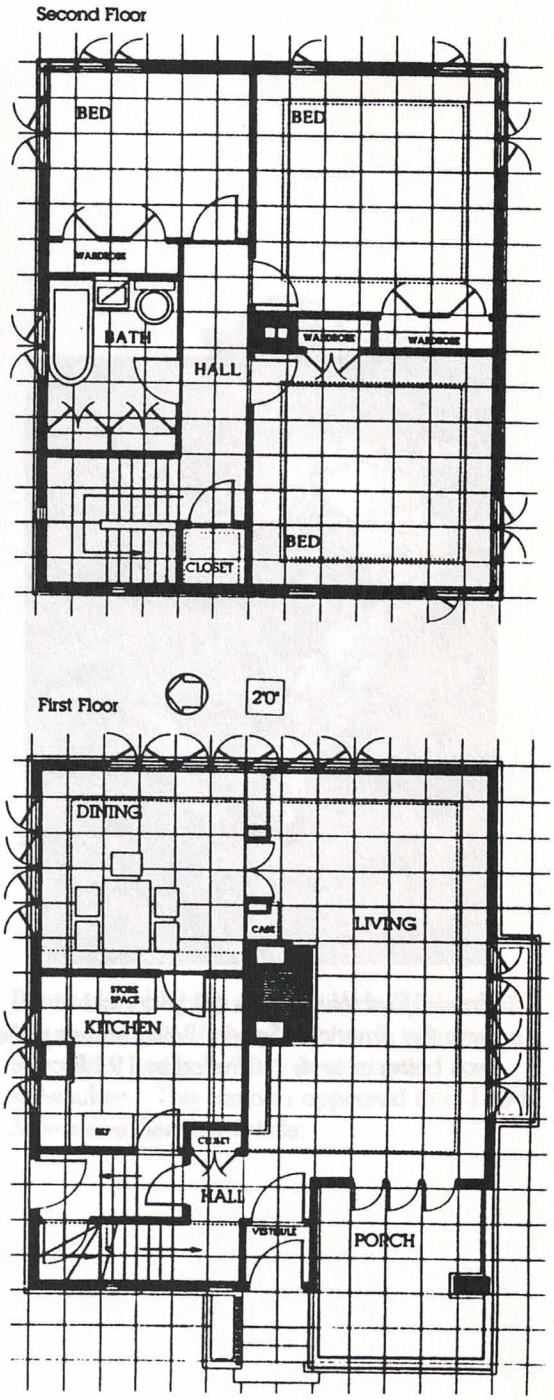
The Hyde House clearly demonstrates Wright's ability to "break the box" enclosing conventional residential architecture of the period. The faceted variety of the street facade is particularly ingenious given the fact that the building is nearly self-contained within a rigid rectangular exterior envelope. At the first floor, punctured openings for the living room and sunroom windows are combined with wood strips to create a horizontally expressed asymmetrical base. Corner windows at the second floor dissolve the rigidity of the overall massing and visually accentuate the projection of the roof eaves.

The main entrance is concealed behind the projection of the front porch. Inside, the principal rooms of the first floor are arranged on axis around the central fireplace chimney stack. The second floor is planned for three bedrooms, each with generous corner windows that provide ample light and ventilation while leaving maximum wall space for the placement of furniture.

Like the Model House, all exterior and interior trim is composed of flat strips of unprofiled lumber. The Hyde House incorporates Wright-designed leaded glass windows consisting of simple geometric patterns executed in zinc came and clear glass. Ornamental glass was offered as an optional feature in American System-Built Houses and was not used in the Model House.

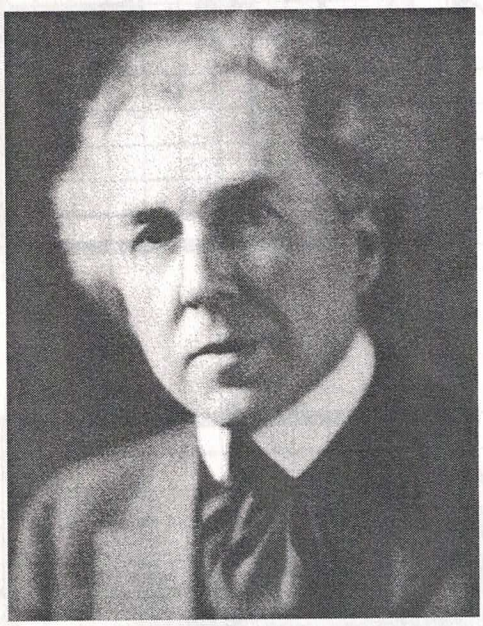
Special Wright-designed furniture was also offered as an optional package, but there is no evidence that either the Hyde House or Model House incorporated any freestanding furniture outside of the standard built-in cabinetry.

The Hyde House remains in an excellent state of preservation both inside and out. An addition to the rear of the house which slightly expands the rooms to the east was executed in materials matching those of the original house, suggesting that the work was executed at an early date.



The plan of the H. Howard Hyde Residence is largely confined within a rectangular footprint yet embodies an open flow of space around the central chimney stack.

Frank Lloyd Wright and the American System-Built House Concept



Frank Lloyd Wright was 50 years old at the time the American System-Built Houses project was being actively promoted in 1917.

No single individual transformed twentieth-century American residential architecture more than Frank Lloyd Wright. A native of Wisconsin, Wright had little formal architectural training before coming to Chicago in 1887 at the age of 20, where he eventually secured employment as a draftsman in the architectural office of Adler & Sullivan. Under the guidance of Louis H. Sullivan, Wright learned to approach the practice of architecture as a creative abstraction of a structure's function, environment, and technology, rather than relying upon accepted conventions and historical precedents. Eventually assuming the position of chief draftsman for the Adler & Sullivan office, Wright's responsibilities included supervision and design development for many of the firm's residential commissions. Establishing his own office in 1893, residential commissions continued to be a large part of Wright's professional practice until his death in 1959.

Popularly referred to as "prairie style," Wright's early twentieth-century residential designs represent an approach to architecture that defies stylistic categorization. Through his buildings and writings, Wright challenged and redefined traditional concepts of residential design and construction. At a time when typical American homes were planned as box-like shells containing a rigid honeycomb of individual rooms, Wright's houses embodied a flowing, humanly scaled complexity that reflected ideal living conditions rather than rigid enclosures. Traditional styles and design conventions were replaced by creative abstractions of function, site, materials, and technology, shaped to the requirements of each individual project. Instead of the superficial decorative detail found in typical houses, Wright's designs incorporated simple surfaces that enhanced the inherent nature of the materials used.

An underlying theme in Wright's work was the creation of affordable, high-quality buildings using mass-production machine technologies. Unlike many contemporary critics who viewed machine technology as an inferior alternative to skilled hand-labor, Wright argued that the machine offered the potential for attaining even higher standards of utility, quality, and beauty. By recognizing the inherent nature of materials and their ability to be economically shaped and enhanced by mass production technologies, high standards of design

and craftsmanship could be made available to all. "The machine is the normal tool of our civilization;" Wright once wrote, "Give it work that it can do well."

The American Dream by Machine

Frank Lloyd Wright was challenged throughout his career by the development of quality, economically priced housing for the American family. Early efforts included the Waller Apartments, a low income housing project developed on Chicago's west side in 1895, and the publication of prototype house designs in the nationally circulated *Ladies Home Journal* magazine between 1901 and 1907. A significant number of Wright's executed designs demonstrated the ability to create above-average housing on a limited budget, many of which were given national exposure through publication in major architectural periodicals.

The combining of Wright's ideals for affordable housing and machine production became a commercial reality through his association with Milwaukee contractor and businessman Arthur L. Richards, who previously established a successful career erecting small residential projects. In 1916, Richards and a group of investors formally organized The Richards Company as a business entity to manufacture and market a prefabricated housing system based on Wright's designs under the name "American System-Built Houses."

The confidence of Richards and his investors in the viability of marketing Wright-designed houses represented an affirmation of Wright's architectural reputation. Even at the height of his architectural practice, only a minority of residential clients were willing to commission a Wright design instead of the traditional houses offered by the typical architect of the period. Although he was able to maintain a fairly prosperous architectural practice prior to 1910, changing public tastes in the next decade reflected a growing preference for convention rather than creativity. Wright's professional career was further hampered by controversies in his personal life, which generated nationwide publicity for reasons other than his architectural achievements.

Under the sponsorship of the Richards Company, Wright's studio developed a wide range of stock designs, and a grouping of prototype houses and apartment buildings was completed in Milwaukee by

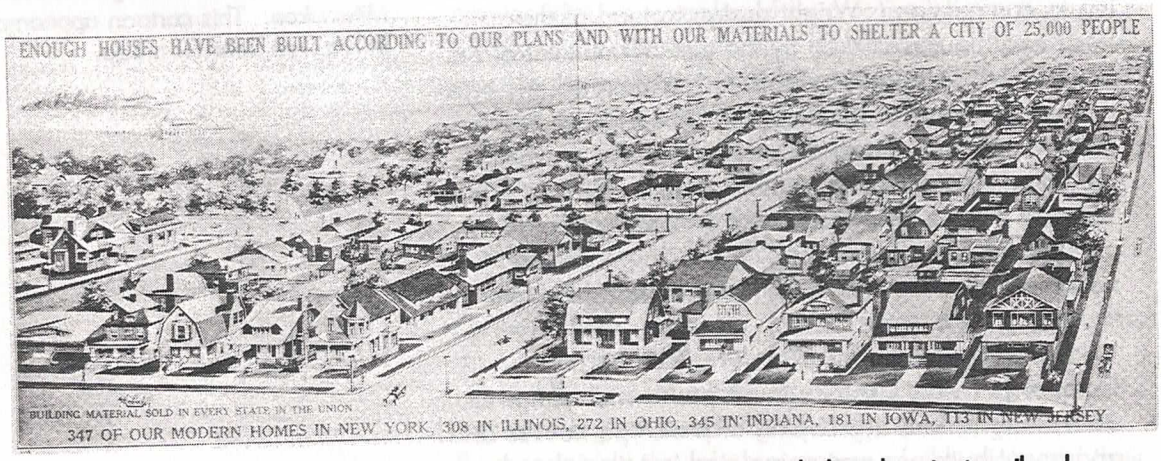
Prior to establishing the American System-Built Houses project, Arthur L. Richards operated a successful home-building business in Milwaukee. This cartoon appeared in a 1904 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article.

mid-1916. By the end of the year a full catalogue of prefabricated designs was made available through newspaper ads and promotional materials. At least two dozen designs for houses and small apartment buildings were initially offered, with prices ranging from $2,700 to $3,500 for "small homes" and between $5,000 to $100,000 for larger buildings. (These prices were about 10-20 percent less than the prices of an average new house of the period.) For his efforts, Wright received a royalty from the Richards Company for each building sold and other financial incentives.

Sales and construction of American System-Built Houses were handled through a network of local representatives franchised by the Richards Company. Buyers of American System-Built Houses were provided the design, materials, and construction at a set package price. Unlike other prefabricated housing companies of the period, which allowed purchasers to assemble their own houses, American System-Built Houses could only be built by an authorized contractor. Under this arrangement, the purchaser of an American System-Built House could be assured of a quality building at a set price without the uncertainty of cost-overruns and the risk of poor quality construction.

Own Your Own Home: Redefining Prefabricated Housing

The inherent generic nature of prefabricated housing presented a challenge to Wright in developing


ENOUGH HOUSES HAVE BEEN BUILT ACCORDING TO OUR PLANS AND WITH OUR MATERIALS TO SHELTER A CITY OF 25,000 PEOPLE
BUILDING MATERIAL SOLD IN EVERY STATE IN THE UNION
347 OF OUR MODERN HOMES IN NEW YORK, 308 IN ILLINOIS, 272 IN OHIO, 345 IN INDIANA, 181 IN IOWA, 113 IN NEW JERSEY

Many firms produced catalogues of prefabricated housing designs, including the giant mail order merchandiser Sears, Roebuck & Company. Traditional designs like those shown in this c. 1910 advertisement for Sears houses are typical of the period.

the American System-Built designs. Unlike Wright's custom-designed projects which were created for specific clients and site locations, the American System-Built designs needed to have broad public appeal and the ability to be built on a wide variety of site conditions. In a lecture given in 1916 to promote American System-Built Houses, Wright recalled his initial reservations about the project:

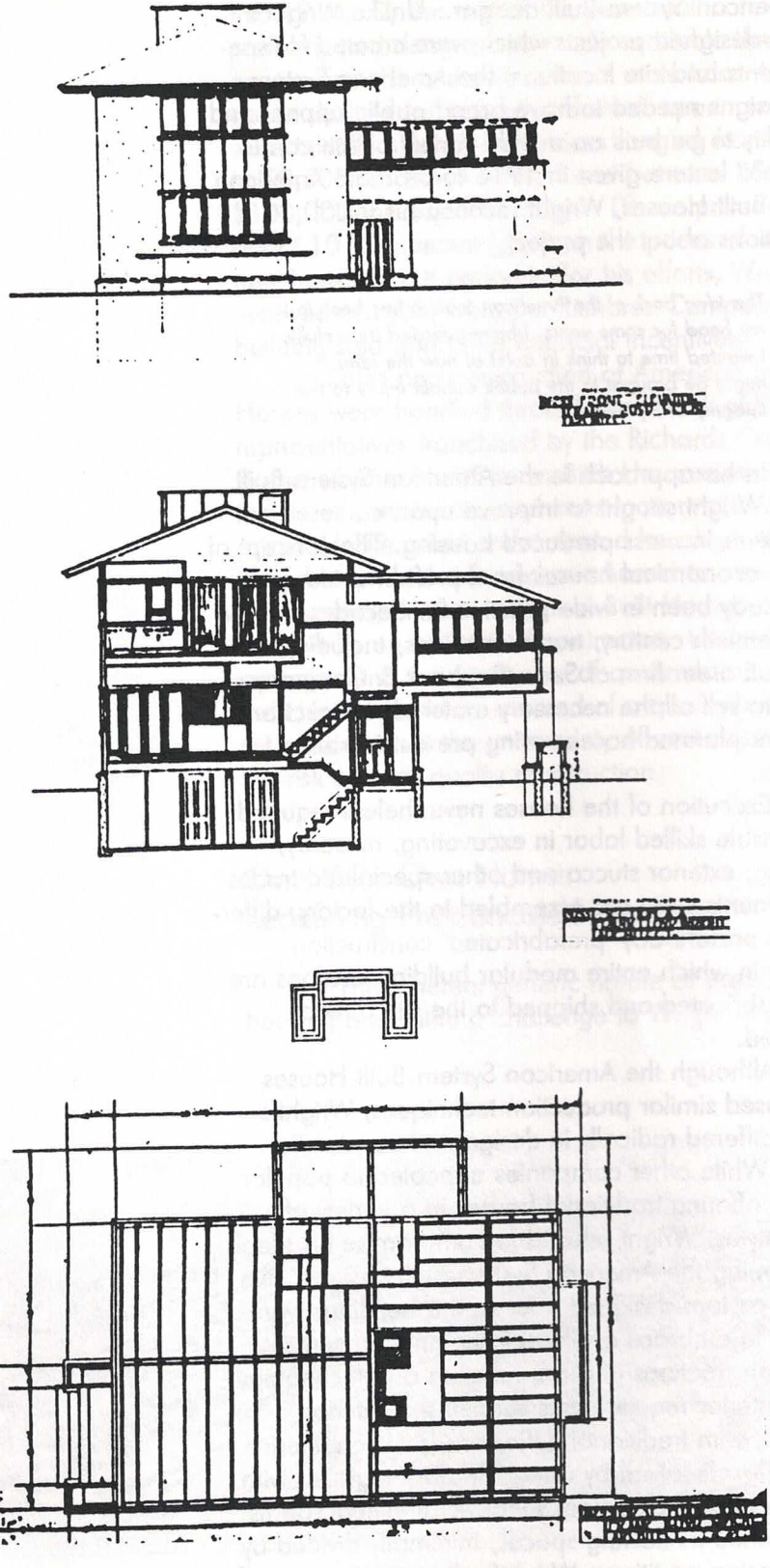
> *The idea back of the American System has been in my head for some years. I have guarded it carefully, I wanted time to think in quiet of how the idea might be brought to the public without injury to the integrity of my own art.*

In his approach to the American System-Built project, Wright sought to improve upon earlier experiments in mass produced housing. The concept of erecting economical houses from prefabricated parts had already been in wide practice for decades. In the early twentieth century, numerous firms, including the giant mail order firm of Sears Roebuck & Company, offered to sell all the necessary materials to erect an entire pre-planned houses using pre-cut-to-size materials.

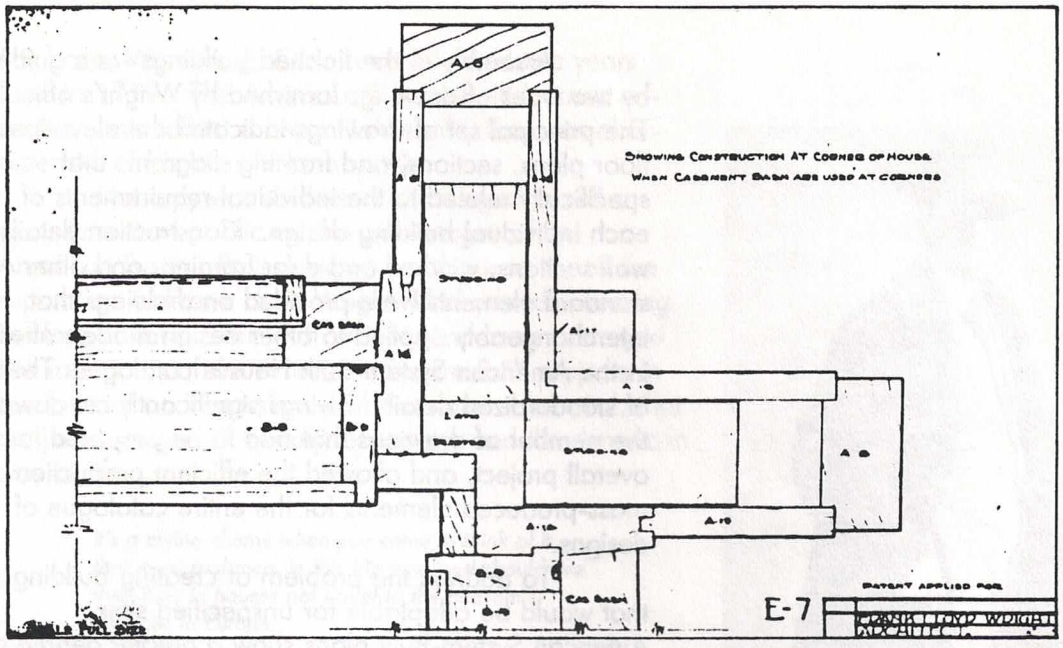
Execution of the houses nevertheless required considerable skilled labor in excavating, masonry, plastering, exterior stucco and other specialized trades. Few elements were pre-assembled in the factory, differing from present-day "prefabricated" construction methods in which entire modular building sections are factory fabricated and shipped to the site already assembled.

Although the American System-Built Houses project used similar production techniques, Wright's designs differed radically in design and construction quality. While other companies appealed to popular tastes by offering traditional houses in a variety of eclectic styles, Wright refused to compromise his ideals in developing the American System-Built designs. Like Wright's custom-designed houses, the buildings were intended to embrace an ideal living environment through abstractions of form, function and technology.

Interior requirements shaped the exterior enclosure, with traditional definitions between interior and exterior dissolved by exterior walls integrated with broad ribbons of casement windows. Principal rooms were planned as flowing spaces, minimally divided by non-enclosing partitions. Wright's characteristic use of



To guide the assembly of the American System-Built Houses, Wright's office prepared floor plans, elevations, sections, framing diagrams, and other details for each individual design in the catalogue. The examples above are for the design used in the Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House.



The pre-shaping of building elements allowed many of the details of the American System-Built Houses to incorporate intricately fitted joinery, achieving a degree of strength and quality not often possible in conventional on-site carpentry.

simply treated natural materials was well-adapted to the inherent nature of prefabricated construction, providing American System-Built Houses with the same distinctive finishes seen in his custom works.

Challenged to create quality buildings that could be sold at costs below typical houses of the period, Wright's designs were devised to maximize the use of machine-produced standardized materials. All American System-Built designs were of wood-frame construction, allowing the efficient factory production of standardized framing members and trim. Factory shaping of wood members allowed the fabrication of complex joinery details that normally could not be achieved using standard on-site carpentry methods, giving American System-Built houses a greater degree of quality and structural stability over conventionally built houses.

Each design was developed on the basis of a two-foot module to allow economical use of standard lumber sizes with minimum waste. The placement of walls, doors, and windows in multiples of a two-foot grid also allowed the factory to make simple modifications to the standard plan if necessitated by client requests or site conditions. While Wright may have initially supervised some of these custom modifications, much of the revision work was probably carried out by the factory without his personal consultation.

Assembly of the finished buildings were guided by two types of drawings furnished by Wright's office. The principal set of drawings indicated the elevations, floor plans, sections, and framing diagrams that specifically related to the individual requirements of each individual building design. Construction details for wall sections, window and door framing, and other standard elements were provided on drawings that interchangeably applied to other design models offered in the American System-Built Houses catalogue. The use of standardized detail drawings significantly cut down the number of drawings that had to be prepared for the overall project, and allowed the efficient production of mass-produced elements for the entire catalogue of designs.

To address the problem of creating buildings that would be adaptable for unspecified sites, American System-Built plans show a greater degree of self-containment within a rectangular volume in comparison to the complex massing and projecting extensions characteristic of Wright's custom-designed buildings. Where the designs incorporated projecting wings or sun-porches extending from the main massing of the building, the plans were often adaptable to allow the deletion of modification of these elements if required by specific site conditions.

Selling the American Dream: Marketing of American System-Built Houses

With the introduction of American System-Built Houses to the commercial marketplace, the Richards Company had to compete with the aggressive promotional campaigns of other prefabricated housing companies. In formulating its own advertising campaign, the Richards Company sought to market the advantages of the American System by emphasizing the idealogy behind its design and construction, and putting a commercial value on the name and architectural reputation of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Handsome renderings executed by Wright's office were prominently featured in advertisements and promotional materials, accompanied by persuasively written texts by noted American writer Sherwood Anderson. Employed as an anonymous copy writer for the Taylor, Critchfield, Clague Company, a Chicago advertising firm, Anderson was at the threshold of nationwide fame as the writer of novels and short stories.

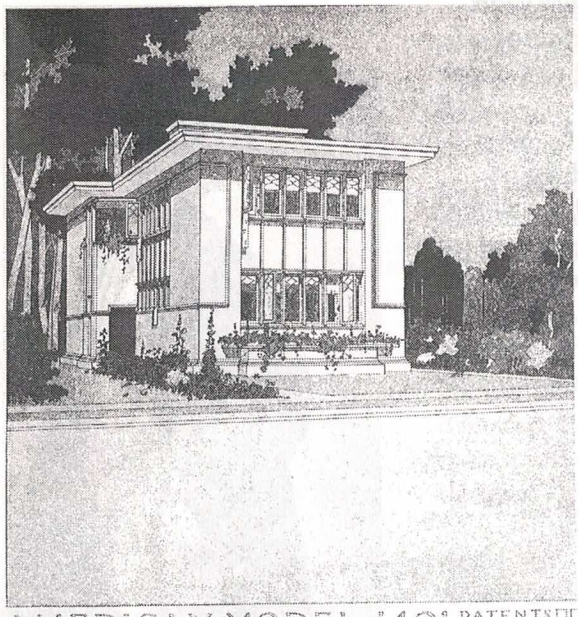
His book, *Winesburg, Ohio*, was released two years later in 1919. The American System-Built Houses advertisements reflect a breezy informality that was characteristic of his later fictional works.

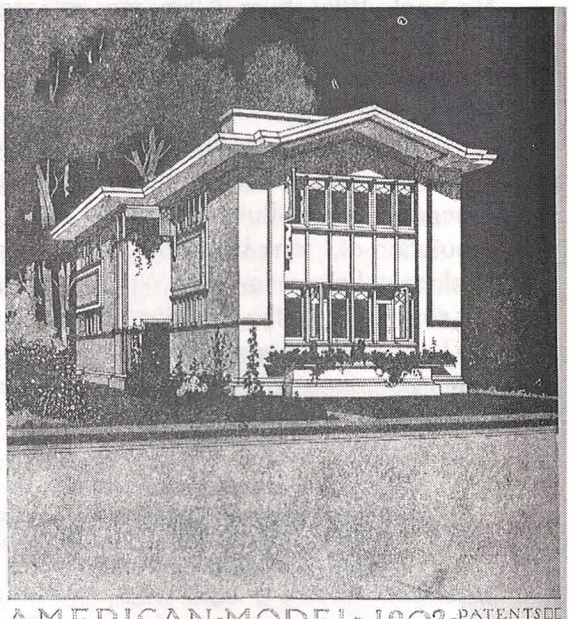
Not only was Anderson challenged to sell a wary American public on the advantages of the American System-Built designs, he also had to sell the reputation of Frank Lloyd Wright. Undoubtedly working in close collaboration with Wright, Anderson portrayed the superiority of the American System-Built projects in the form of an impassioned one-on-one sales pitch that conjured images of beauty, economy, and the American way of life.

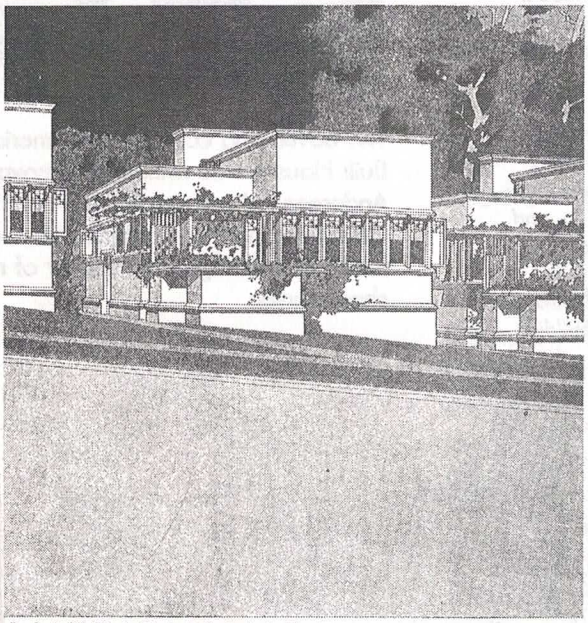
> *It's a crying shame when you come to think of it -- that men, real men, in this big free land should live their lives in houses not equal to the peasant's cottages in Europe.*
>
> *But things are going to change now. The genius of a really great man has been brought into the building trade in America. Frank Lloyd Wright, the greatest architect America has known, is pouring his genius into creating this great AMERICAN SYSTEM of houses for the American people. We want you to see the models of these houses. We want you to understand how the genius of this man has made it possible for every home builder to build beautifully without spending more to achieve beauty than he now spends for senseless ugliness.*
>
> *Here is what Mr. Wright has done. As an American you ought to appreciate it. He has designed many types of houses, each of them beautiful beyond belief, and each susceptible of infinite variation, and has worked out the design of these designs so practically that they can be built by ordinary labor under ordinary conditions at from 10% to 29% less cost than the ugly houses we have all been building so long.*

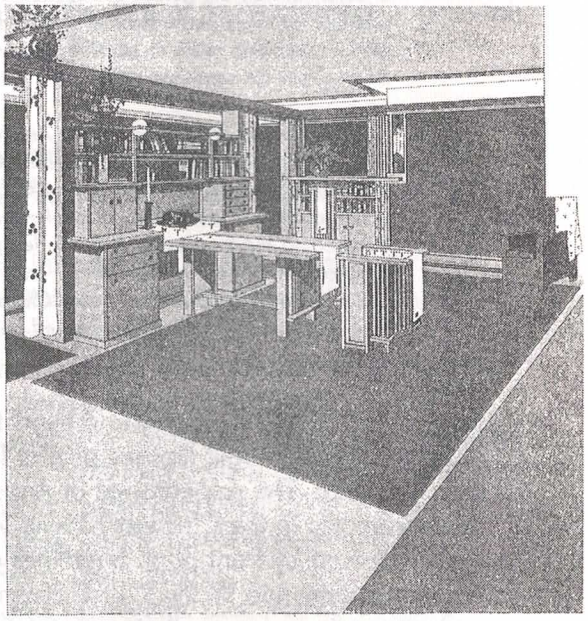
The advertising copy for the American System-Built Houses was written by Sherwood Anderson, whose employment with a Chicago advertising agency preceded his subsequent fame as a distinguished author of novels and short stories.

For all its lofty ideals and expectations, the American Systems-Built Houses project lasted for less than one year. The appearance of Anderson's illustrated advertisements in the *Chicago Tribune* were overshadowed by front page headlines announcing America's entry into World War I. Shortages in labor and materials and a general uncertainty over wartime conditions abruptly stifled a booming housing market. Further complications may have derived from strained relations between Wright and the Richards Company over payment of fees and royalties, as evidenced by









Promotional literature was illustrated with elegant renderings by Wright assistant Antonin Raymond. The graphic style and wood engraving process used in the preparation of these materials reflect Wright's interest in Japanese prints.

court records in which Wright sought to recover $1,535 from the firm in August 1917.

Less than 20 of the American System-Built designs are known to have been built throughout the Midwest. Ten were constructed in Milwaukee (six survive); two in Evanston; one in Wilmette; one in Monona, Iowa; and one in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Richards Co. records are presumed lost, and a search of Wright's archives has revealed no complete listing of executed buildings from the short-lived project.

Epilogue: Success from Failure

As the residential housing market diminished at the beginning of the war, Arthur L. Richards dissolved the network he had established for the manufacture and sale of American System-Built Houses. Even as the housing market began to recover in the post-war years, Richards' subsequent construction ventures were largely confined to small residential projects in the Milwaukee area. The post-war "prairie-style" houses erected by Richards showed continued confidence in Wright's architectural ideals, but the designs themselves were entrusted to Russell Barr Williamson, a former Wright assistant who had previously worked on the American System-Built project. As far as can be determined, all were built by traditional construction methods, without using prefabricated components.

Ridge Homes

Although located over a block apart, the Model Home and the Hyde House stood throughout the war years in clear view of each other, separated by broad expanses of land awaiting a community of Wright-designed houses that was never to come.

By 1920, the gradual revival of the housing market encouraged Burhans-Ellinwood & Company to resume development of the "Ridge Homes" subdivision. Without the availability of the Wright-designed American System-Built Houses, the architectural firm of Aroner & Bacon was commissioned to design a series of speculative brick homes along the 10400 and 10500 blocks of Hoyne Avenue. Although an attempt was made to reflect the character of the Wright-designed homes in several of the brick houses erected beginning

in 1920, their overall character fell short of the ideals of the earlier development.

Being of no further use as a demonstration model house, the Wright-designed Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House was sold in 1920 to Guy C. Smith, an economist with Swift & Company. Subsequent houses erected along Hoyne Avenue in the 1920s displayed a variety of traditional historicized treatments, forever disrupting the architectural continuity originally envisioned for Ridge Homes.

Wright's Influence on Twentieth Century Domestic Architecture

For Frank Lloyd Wright, the years following the American System-Built Houses project were successful from a creative standpoint but difficult in terms of his architectural practice. Although he produced major projects like Tokyo's Imperial Hotel and the Hollyhock House and an innovative series of concrete-block houses in the Los Angeles area, Wright experienced a continued decline in commissions and professional recognition throughout the 1920s and early 30s.

With a lack of commissions to occupy his time, Wright spent much of his time writing architectural essays, the most famous being the continuing series "In the Cause of Architecture," published in the *Architectural Record* throughout the 1920s. In an installment entitled

Many aspects of the design of the ubiquitous "Chicago bungalow" are Wright influences: overhanging hipped roofs, crisp lines, and art glass windows. Above, a design by the Radford Company, one of the largest suppliers of stock designs in the 1920s.

"The Logic of the Plan," published in January 1928, Wright included one of the American System-Built plans as an example of designing on a modular grid, noting the use of a two-foot spacing to "economize lumber."

Despite his lack of recognition during this period, the influence of Wright's buildings and writings had firmly infiltrated into the mainstream of American architecture. Few buildings erected in the 1920s and beyond could not acknowledge some sort of debt to the liberating innovations of form, plan, and technology developed by Wright over the preceding decades. Ironically, even the architects of traditional buildings found themselves assimilating aspects of Wright's innovations into their designs, while others creatively expanded his visions in new directions. Even the ubiquitous brick "Chicago bungalows" erected throughout the city's neighborhoods in the 1920s owed their distinctive crisp lines, overhanging hipped roofs, and geometrical art glass windows to Wright's influence.

The late 1930s marked a renewed affirmation of Frank Lloyd Wright's reputation as architect of international importance. The period between 1935 and Wright's death in 1959 were among the busiest and most productive of his career, resulting in such major commissions as the Johnson's Wax complex in Racine, Wisconsin, Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Wright never lost his interest in affordable housing, however, and continued to evolve new applications for the concepts originally introduced in the American System-Built Houses project. In the late 1930s, Wright adapted many aspects of the earlier project in an ongoing series of moderately-priced dwellings known as "Usonian Houses." Unlike the mass-produced stock designs of the American System-Built Houses projects, each Usonian House was custom designed for individual owners and sites, but the two projects shared a similar use of standardized machine-produced component parts and assembly details that could be economically replicated for each building.

Interest in prefabricated housing was revived as a result of the housing shortages following World War II. Although the production of prefabricated houses never stopped altogether, the industry experienced a renewed vigor in the 1950s as numerous companies offered an expanded range of house designs. The prefabricated buildings offered in the 1950s were

typically lackluster in design and quality, although they ironically offered many of the innovations that Wright had originated decades earlier. Even Wright himself re-entered the prefabricated housing market in the 1950s, producing designs for a short-lived line of prefabricated houses offered by the Marshall Erdman Company of Madison, Wisconsin.

Despite its short commercial life, the American System-Built Houses project of 1917 was anything but a failure. The concepts reflected in the American System-Built Houses project represent an important step in the development of American residential architecture as interpreted through the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright. The two extant American System-Built Houses in Chicago represent the visionary combination of Wright's architectural principles with prefabricated housing.

Frank Lloyd Wright's *new prefabricated house (made by Erdman Homes) as seen from the street. Entrance is in the corner of the L-shape plan.*

Here is prefabrication's biggest news for 1957

Entrance *is set deep into house for protection from elements. Frank Lloyd Wright planned and supervised the landscaping.*

Glazed doors *(below) are typical Wright detail, made inexpensively. Low entry ceiling makes 13' living room seem taller.*

Frank Lloyd Wright has at long last built a prefab house and Erdman Homes is putting it on the market for 1957.

This is both big news and amazing news.

It is big news because it gives prefabrication—once the stepchild of home building—the prestige associated with the greatest name in contemporary architecture.

It is amazing news, because the principal advocate of standardization and modular planning had to wait 60 years before he got his chance to put his original theories into practice. Wright had been designing panel construction systems since 1910 using materials like wood, steel and concrete.

The house shown on this page grew out of a long association between Wright and Marshall Erdman, the prefabricator. At the start of the project Erdman told Wright, "we must use stock materials to save me from bankruptcy; anyone can make a shake roof look good, but it takes a master to make something of asphalt shingles." Wright sat down and detailed for the roof the shadowline battens you see in the photograph.

The walls have battens too, to seal joints in the wallboard, and give the house a sweeping horizontal look. Even the stock wood windows have been handled in a refreshing manner. They are grouped in long horizontal bands or in large geometric patterns. At the gable end they are cut to fit the slope of the pitched roofs.

One of the great qualities of Wright's genius is his ability to satisfy rigid conditions. This prefabricated house is a case in point: it has every basic design idea in Wright's vocabulary, yet it can be produced within the prefabricator's budget.

To see how it's prefabricated, turn the page ⟶

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Wright again experimented with prefabricated housing in the 1950s, developing a series of designs for the Erdman Company of Madison, Wis., which were reprinted in *House and Home* magazine.

APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

Designation of the Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House and the H. Howard Hyde House as a Chicago Landmark is recommended because both houses meet three of the criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-210-620 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

CRITERION 3

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House and the H. Howard Hyde House are closely identified with Arthur L. Richards (1877-1955) who advanced the architectural development of American housing through his establishment of the American System-Built Houses project in 1916. Beginning his career as the contractor of small residential projects in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Richards had the foresight to engage Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) to design a line of commercially available prefabricated houses which made the creativity and idealism of Wright's designs available to a broad public audience.

CRITERION 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship

The Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House and the H. Howard Hyde House represent the merging of the so-called "Prairie School" of architecture with the concept of prefabricated construction. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the leading practitioner of an architectural approach distinguished by the creative unity of form, function and technology, the houses represent an attempt to make quality housing affordable by using mass-production methods. Both houses are in an excellent state of preservation on the exterior and interior, and constitute internationally significant examples of this architectural type and technology.

CRITERION 5

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House and H. Howard Hyde House are important examples of the work of master architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The houses are the only known examples of Wright's prefabricated designs for the American System-Built Houses project to have been erected in Chicago, and constitute important links in the fragile chronology of Wright's extant works in the Chicago area.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Based on its evaluation of the Burhans-Ellinwood & Company Model House and the H. Howard Hyde House, the staff recommends that all aspects, exterior and interior, of the houses be identified as significant historical and architectural features.

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Chicago Tribune

PERIODICALS:

The Architectural Record

Additional material used in the preparation of this report is on file and available to the public in the offices of the Landmarks Division of the Department of Planning and Development.

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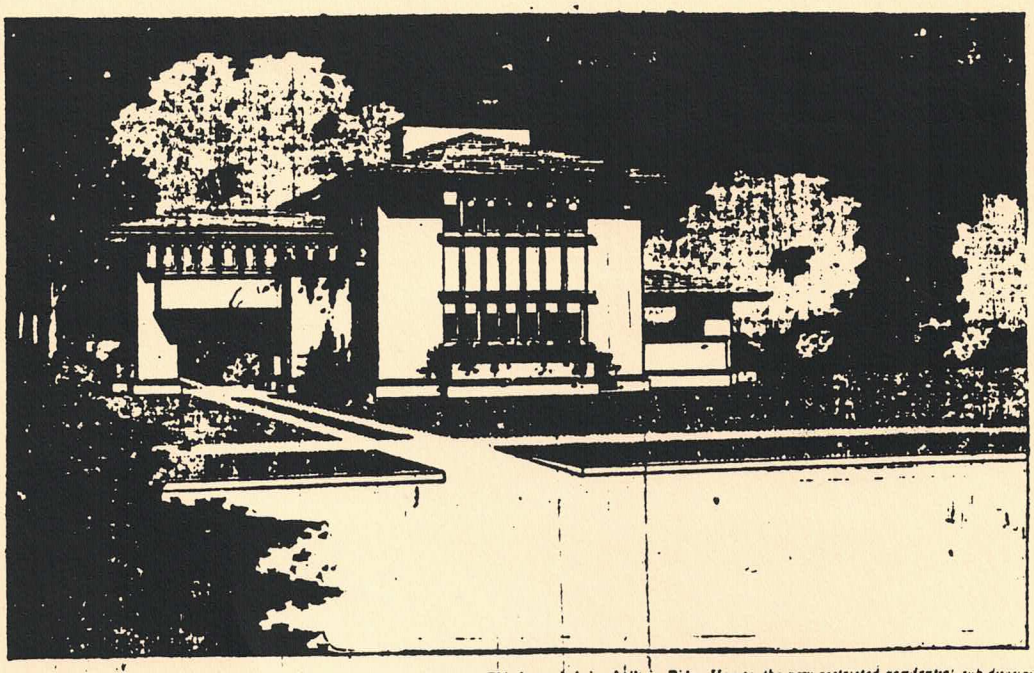
From *Antonin Raymond, An Autobiography* (1973)
(pp. cover, 16)
Chicago Department of Planning and Development
(pp. 3, 4, 6)
W. A. Storrer, c. Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation
(pp. 5, 7)
From *Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph, 1914-1923* (1985)
(pp. 8, 13)
From *American System-Built Houses in Milwaukee* (1985)
(p. 9)
From *Chicago Creating New Traditions* (1976)
(p. 10)
From *Chicago In Story* (1982)
(p. 15)
From *Radford Cyclopedia of Construction, 1926*
(p. 18)
From *House and Home* magazine, December 1956
(p. 20)



This home is being built in Ridge Homes, the new restricted residential subdivision now being offered by Burnham-Ellinwood & Co. at Tracy, 103rd St. and Hoyne Ave.

Good News About Homes

THERE'S a bright, cheerful home waiting for your family and you. A better home. Better built, excellently planned, far more livable.

More beautiful? Yes, it will have that rare thing—genuine architectural beauty—designed by a leader of architects.

You select your plan. It is built to your order—your own.

Designed by America's great creative architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Constructed by a system which guarantees you a high grade building and a known price—no extras.

In short, an AMERICAN HOME.

The cost is not more but less. Terms of purchase are such that every family of steady income can have their own AMERICAN HOME. This is an inviting, a cheering possibility, which can come true however small or large a home you wish.

The builders whose names are below will help you accomplish this. Call upon them. Or, if none is near you, call at the office, 7 West Madison Street.

DEALERS

Elmhurst
GEO. R. CHAPMAN
S. E. Corner Kenilworth Ave. and St. Charles Road
Telephone Elmhurst 24

Chicago
M. S. HUBBARD
33 N. Dearborn St.
Rm. 426; Ph. Cent. 1881

North Shore *Oak Park* *Austin* *Maywood* *River Forest*
La Grange *Western Springs* *Downer's Grove* *Hinsdale* *Naperville*
AMERICAN HOME BUILDING COMPANY
Room 836, 7 West Madison Street. Phone Central 677

Berwyn
ELLINWOOD & BRAGG
Corner Oak Park and Windsor Aves
Phones Berwyn 525; Rand [illegible]

Gary, Indiana
INGWOLD MOE
Pres. of the General Construction Co., 201-4 Gary Theatre Bldg. Phone Gary 25 or 26

Waukegan
BARNUM & WELLS
Coen Building

Champaign, Ill.
J. F. HESSEL

Park Ridge
MURPHY BROS.
Phone Park Ridge 1021

South Side *Riverside* *Hollywood*
P. D. DIAMOND & COMPANY
211 W. 119th Place Phone Beverly 412
Loop Office, Room 833 7 W. Madison St.

TO BUILDERS: These houses are built by builders having exclusive rights in their territories. There are still desirable territories not yet closed, for which we will be glad to hear from strong builders who can appreciate the sales possibilities of this enterprise. This applies not only to the immediate Chicago district, but to the surrounding Middle West which is handled from the Chicago office.

TO SUBDIVIDERS: Nothing could better put the stamp of quality on any subdivision than the building of some of these American Homes, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. We will be glad to show you how easily this is possible.

PETTIT & ROCKWELL, 7 West Madison Street, Telephone Central 677
Chicago Branch of THE RICHARDS COMPANY, Milwaukee

Illustrated advertisements persuasively stressed the advantages of American System-Built Houses in the context of American family life. From the *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 1917.

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